
Conceptualizing Ethics Education under the Joint JD/MSW Degree Program: An Overview

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Abstract

Several factors inhibit effective collaboration of social workers and lawyers. Notably are their respective professional codes of conducts which mandate divergent approaches to practice. As a result most of the dilemmas encountered by social workers and lawyers are often due to the clash of the respective ethics provisions. Interdisciplinary education has been embraced as a way to enable students to acquire the necessary skills and competencies for resolving ethical challenges in order to effectively collaborate at the several instances where their practices overlap. In view of the strategic relevance of the ethical imperatives of both professions, this article highlights various issues in developing interdisciplinary curriculum and pedagogical methods under the framework of the joint JD/MSW degree program.

... It is recommended to the faculties of law schools and schools of Social work that by dialogue or other methods, they become ever more aware of their mutuality of interests and the increasing number of matters of common concern to both professions. *If a feeling of mutual understanding and trust is to exist between members of the legal profession and members of the social work profession, it would seem that the best way of creating this feeling would be to have it started at the heart of the educational work*

Several methods may be explored to achieve that dialogue which is desirable between students of law and students of social work. Among such methods is *a joint enrollment of students in courses of interest to both professions.... a working collaboration between students of both professions in a clinical experience in which both groups are exposed to the complexities surrounding the legal rights, responsibilities and possibilities of those living in poverty ... (emphasis added) (NCLSW, 1969).*

Introduction

Although now moribund, the National Conference of Lawyers and Social Workers (NCLSW) provided the framework for the establishment of joint JD/MSW degree programs that are currently available in dozens of schools of law and social work across the nation. In issuing the above recommendations the NCLSW's main goal was to "improve working relationships between the professions of law and social work" (Hazard, 1972, p. 423). Evident in the overall statement are, among other cogent reasons the needs to check unauthorized practice of law by determining or promoting cordial working relationship between both professions thereby reducing the tension that often manifest in situations where the practices of both professions overlap. In an evaluative study of schools that offer interdisciplinary law and social work programs, Hazard noted:

An important aspect of promoting better relationships and wider dissemination of information between the two groups

concerns the basic professional training in each of the two disciplines. In particular, it is a matter of importance whether at the professional school level there is an informed and accurate picture of social work on the part of law students and vice versa... (p. 423).

Hazard's article, published three years from the NCLSW recommendations, found that various educational programs had already been established by some schools of law and social work across the country. The study also found that there was the opportunity for much closer cooperation between schools of law and social work. At the time the study was published only one school had established a full joint JD/MSW degree program, but there was an overwhelming expression of possibility of more joint degree programs. According to documents obtained from the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2005), 47 schools of law and social work have been accredited and currently offer joint JD/MSW degree programs.

This need raises the question as to how lawyers and social workers can be best educated to work in such settings (Madden, 1998). As Schroeder (1995) has noted, "Law is a useful tool in social engineering. The more clearly social workers understand this, the more creative they can be in using law to remedy social ills" (p. 3). In the same vein, lawyers are required to be educated in social work for mutuality to exist between both professional groups at their points of convergence.

In an article: "Interdisciplinary combined-degree and graduate degree programs: History and trends," Crane (1999 cited by Coleman, 2001) argued that "It is misleading to refer to the programs as joint degree programs because students are simply enrolled in two or more totally separate terminal degree programs in two schools within the same university simultaneously" (p. 131). That perception of the joint JD/MSW education is not wholly shared by Brigid Coleman, a product of the joint JD/MSW degree program. Thus in her article titled "Lawyers who are also social workers: How to effectively combine two different disciplines to better serve clients" Coleman (2001, p. 131) contends: "My experience has mostly been one of cooperation between the two schools and awareness of the special situation of dual degree students." Evidently, the notion of joint education is susceptible to varying interpretations depending on the lens, experience, or other special circumstances of the interpreter.

Despite its relevance and necessity as a new paradigm in law and social work education, the JD/MSW degree program suffers from lack of attention in scholarship as no major research, empirical or otherwise has addressed the phenomenon to date.

The problem

As noted above, the prevalence of conflict between social workers and lawyers stem mainly from the different methods of education and socialization that produce them, as well as the influence of the legal system and legislation over both the regulation and practice of social work (Madden, 1998; Schroeder, 1995; Smith, 1970). Although this paper is focused on ethics component mainly, interdisciplinary education and differences in approaches to practice are highlighted in the table below for helpful insight into the phenomenon.

Table 1: Major impediments to interdisciplinary education and collaboration between both professions

1. Education and Training differences

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| <u>Social Worker</u> Focuses on human interactions and systems theory Evaluates and addresses underlying issues and non-verbal cues Develops ability to synthesize information Field-work based Experimental and reflective. | <u>Lawyer</u> Focuses on statute, cases, law, procedure and strategy Evaluates and addresses present legal problems Develops analytic skills Class-room based Research oriented |
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2. Style differences in practice methods

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| <u>Social Worker</u> Collaborative Supportive/consensus-building Relies on shared decision making Process-focused Defines goals diffusely Uses professional relationship to effect change in client and/or environment | <u>Lawyer</u> Confrontational Adversarial approaches Relies on individual autonomy Outcome-focused (win or lose) Defines goals narrowly Uses legal system to resolve problems |
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3 Differences in Ethics

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|--|---|
| <u>Social Worker</u> Assessment driven decision-making Individual and society Confidentiality (Disclosure required by law in limited situations) Mandated reporter | <u>Lawyer</u> Client-determined decision-making Individual client Confidentiality (Disclosure permitted, but not required, only in very limited situations) Not a mandated reporter |
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Sources: ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, (2001); Legal Aid Society, October, 2010; NASW (Code of Ethics, 1999).

The American Bar Association (ABA) provides leadership in legal ethics through adoption of professional standards that serve as models designed to be adapted by different jurisdictions or agencies both as an inspirational guide to the members of the profession and as a basis for disciplinary action when the conduct of a lawyer falls below the required minimum standards stated in the code. Similarly, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics sets forth the values, principles and standards to guide social workers conduct. The Code is relevant to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in which they work, or the population they serve. The social work profession has an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles, and ethical standards. Consequently, both Social workers and Lawyers face ethical and legal choices in a wide range of practice settings (Reamer, 2005). There is therefore, a need to address ethics concerns in the curriculum and pedagogy of joint education in law and social work.

Conceptualizing Ethics Content in the Joint JD/MSW Degree Program

Conceptualization requires the setting of a goal which students are expected to attain at the completion of the training in order for them to become capable of resolving ethical dilemmas among other things (Walsh, Gordon, Marshall, Wilson & Hunt, 2005; Weil, 2005). Its conceptualized should take cognizance of the historical, theoretical, and contextual factors that characterize each discipline. To be meaningful the conceptual framework needs to further be grounded in the objectives and values of issues associated with ethics, and the culture of collaborative practices.

Curriculum and ethics content

Curriculum drives how teaching and learning goals are to be accomplished. It influences the learners' perception of society while helping to shape their approach to future undertaking and roles in a variety of ways. In an interdisciplinary context, curricular development is a shared corporate responsibility needing widespread participation of all stakeholders, notably faculty and administrators. This guarantees and ensures a sense of community and connectedness, thus eliminating any cultural issues that may threaten the interdisciplinary ideal (Beyer & Apple, 1988; Cole, 2012; Hultgreen, 2006).

Joint education curriculum must contain specific learning objectives supportive of interprofessional practice-based learning and oriented toward interprofessional collaboration competencies (Colarossi & Forgey, 2006; Slater, 2007). These competences are vital in the sense that a strong grounding in ethics and related skills will help to enhance interprofessional collaboration. The literature in this domain focuses on the potential gains, and less discussion on ethics content in a curriculum with which to educate the legal and social work professionals. Ethics contents are to ensure that education provides students the opportunity to strengthen the variety of intellectual faculties that they possess or which curriculum demands (Beyer & Apple, 1988; Hultgreen, 2006).

1. Pedagogy: Instructional and learning models

Advances in modern technology have expanded the scope of Instructional Design Theory (IDT), enabling the use of new educational technologies. For example, the cutting-age technology of the World Wide Web, sources and computer-based legal research (Lexis-Nexis, West Law, among others) are important tools for social workers to update their knowledge about current changes in the law. IDT is that branch of knowledge concerned with research about instructional strategies and the process for developing and implementing those strategies. As a *science*, it is the science of creating detailed specifications for the development, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of situations that facilitate the learning of both large and small units of subject matter at all levels of complexity, and as *reality*: it can start at any point in the design process

IDT and learning theories present guidelines for the design and application of appropriate instruction as well as offer descriptions of how people learn. Although typically grounded in learning theory, IDT is more easily applied to educational problems to describe specific methods of instruction for helping people to learn. IDT is probabilistic, not deterministic (Watson, 2007). Learning theories describe how learning occurs and are descriptive. The contemporary view of instruction is a systematic process in which every component – instructor, learner, material and learning environment- is crucial to successful learning (Dick, Carey &

Carey, 2001). This means that IDT does not guarantee but instead increases the probability that the desired instructional and learning outcomes will occur (Watson, 2007).

Distinction is made between an IDT method that defines how to organize the whole design process and an instructional model that represents a class of a pedagogical design with stronger focus on learning theory than IDT methods, for example: how to teach or how to bring people to learn. Models help a designer to visualize the problem, to break it down into discrete, manageable units. The value of a specific model is determined within the context of use (Dick, Carey & Carey, 2001).

Methods of instructional delivery

In his article titled “Teaching Ethics Seriously: Legal Ethics as the most important subject in Law School”, Pearce (1998) observed that: “Despite lip service given to the importance of legal ethics, most law schools, with a notable exceptions, fail to give legal ethics the same respect and attention given to other courses, let alone a central role in the curriculum” (p. 720). A comparison of law school teaching of legal ethics and that of social work ethics by schools of social work shows that the latter is mandated by the regulatory bodies, and integrated in the social work curriculum.

Historically, the teaching of legal ethics or professional responsibility had consisted of lecture series by judges or other guest lecturer series. As Rhodes (1992) observed “For many of these series, no credit and no grades were given, sometimes, as it turned out, neither were there lectures” (p. 35). Law schools’ lack of commitment to the teaching of ethics courses is blamed on what some experts termed: “character building function” of legal education (Pearce, 1998). It is widely thought that law is a science, hence the case method legal education, the use of appellate cases as the raw materials and law libraries serve as laboratories for educating legal professionals (Burns, 1993; Weinberger, 2007).

Theoretical Frameworks: Ethics, Learning Models, and Collaboration

Early ethical theories were dominated by the Divine Will and Command doctrines that also had links with Natural Law Theory (Boeree, 1999). Historically the various ethical traditions that existed across different societies did not encompass a true universal theory. However, they represented altruistic rather than egoistic attitudes towards humanity (Boeree, 1999; Freud & Krug, 2002). In its broadest sense ethical theories promoted the idea that nothing is right or wrong outside of God’s will.

Contemporary ethics epistemology is split between the Utilitarian theory, concerned with the maximization of satisfaction of all relevant people’s preferences and interests. The other is the Categorical Imperatives which promotes the ideal that a person should act only in ways that she or he thinks would be advantageous if everyone else did likewise (Boeree, 1999; Freud & Krug, 2002).

In a nutshell, these principles exist to ensure: (1) *Beneficence* meaning that ethical theories should strive to achieve the greatest amount of good because people benefit from the most good. (2) *Least Harm* suggests that in a situation where doing good is impossible, a person should choose to do the least harm possible and to do harm to the fewest people. (3) *Respect for Autonomy* provides that an ethical theory should allow people to reign over themselves and to be able to make decisions that apply to their lives, and (4) *Justice*, represents the notion that is the hallmark of ethical principle of fairness to all (Rainbow, 2002).

In view of the respective ethical mandates of the two professions, lawyers and social workers need to be adequately prepared educationally to collaborate. According to a study by the Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2010): "Making good ethical decisions requires a trained sensitivity to ethical issues and a practical method for exploring the ethical aspects of a decision and weighing the considerations that impact our choices of a course of action" (p. 3). Consequently, both the conceptual and pedagogical choices for imparting the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to students are of the essence.

Instructional and learning theories: Constructivism

Constructivist theory is used in this paper to justify possible the learning method. However, to better place it in context, it is briefly contrasted with Cognitivist paradigm. Cognitivist is concerned with the internal mental process of the mind and how they could be utilized in promoting effective learning. The influence of the cognitive instructional design is evidenced by the use of mnemonic devices, metaphors, chunking into meaningful parts and the careful sequencing of materials from simple to complex (Mergel, 1998). The overall benefit of this approach is its integration of new knowledge with previous information through the process of knowledge coding and representation, information storage and retrieval (Saettler, 1990). Elaboration Theory (ET), which applies to the design of instruction for the cognitive domain aims to help select and sequence content in a way that it will optimize attainment of learning goals (Reigeluth, 1999). ET is learner-centered and intended primarily for medium to complex kinds of cognitive and psychomotor learning.

Constructivism on the other hand stresses the process of learning rather than trying to identify cognitive stages. It is based on the assumption that all knowledge takes place as learners construct their own meaning from their own experience, back grounds, and attitudes. Constructivism makes learning more relevant to students by imbedding in real authentic situations, helps them learn to solve problems, think critically, and learn how to learn (Watson, 2007). Bruner (1966) and Vygotsky (1978) made substantial contributions to constructivist approaches to learning. Their works within the constructivist movement highlighted the virtues of integrated curriculum model. Curriculum integration is a generic term for varied approaches that draw on more than one subject or discipline (Klein, 2005).

Adult learning

Both the JD and MSW are graduate programs, and students enrolled at such levels are considered adults. This article employs the following three important methods for fostering learning in adults: i) Andragogy, ii) Problem-based-learning (PBL) and iii) Situated learning. Each of these methods support the assumption that adults are more self-directed, have a need for direct application to their work, and are able to contribute more to collaborative learning and practice through their experience.

Andragogy

Its relevance is based on the assumption that learning builds upon a prior knowledge that learners have (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Malcolm Knowles defined it as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). This, he contrasted with pedagogy which is "the art and science of teaching children" (p. 40). Andragogy is sometimes referred to as critical pedagogy. Adult learners are intrinsically motivated hence andragogy is based on the developmental interests and self-concept of adults. The instructor has a responsibility to create

conditions and provide tools and procedures for helping learners discover their needs to know, Adult learners see education as a process of developing increased competence to achieve their full potential in life. They want to be able to apply whatever knowledge and skill they gain.

Problem-based-learning (PBL)

PBL seeks to increase problem-solving and critical thinking skills. It grew out of the field of health science education and has evolved over the years. It enhances learner-centered, multidisciplinary education that promotes life-long learning in professional practice (Boud & Felett, 1997). PBL is an instructional and curricular learner-centered approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem. According to Savery (2006), critical to the success of the approach is “the selection of ill-structured problems (often interdisciplinary) and a tutor who guides the learning process and conducts a thorough debriefing at the conclusion of the learning experience” (p. 12).

Situated learning

Situated learning targets specific technical skills that can be directly related to the field of work basically considered an off-shoot of the concept of apprenticeship and authentic tasks in learning that began in the late 1980s (Watson, 2007). Traditionally, the social and physical environment that enhance situated learning are identified by researchers, notably Herrington and Oliver (1995) to include 1) authentic context about use of knowledge in real life, 2) authentic action, 3) access to expert performances and process modeling, 4) multiple perspectives and roles 5) construction of knowledge, 6) through collaboration 7) coaching and scaffolding, 8) reflection, 9) articulation to make task knowledge explicit, and 10) assessment of learning integrated within the tasks. Computers have been identified as suitable alternatives for producing an authentic context. An advantage in applying adult learning concept in this context is the greater need for applied learning and the immediate usable knowledge which learners already possess (Silver & Leslie, 2009).

Interprofessional collaboration: *Reflective Practitioner Theory* (RPT)

Lawyers and social workers collaborate in many different ways and in different practice settings including in government offices, private agency/organizational level, in private practice whereby a lawyer employs a social worker or vice versa, or by a short term consultancy arrangement. Each of the above settings impacts collaboration and outcome one way or another. The RPT is appropriate in this context. According to Schon (1983), reflective practice enables professionals to understand how they use their knowledge in practical situations and how they can combine practice and learning in a more effective way. Therefore, knowing how to frame situations and ideas help professionals of law and social work to achieve greater flexibility and increase capacity of conceptual innovation. RPT stresses the importance of explicit training that would enable professionals to understand the cognitive maps and values maps of others. The framework suggests, accordingly, that the capacity of professionals to practice in a collaborative environment depends primarily upon their ability to understand and respect the cognitive patterns such as (a) the way others conceptualize problems and interventions, and (b) the values of every professional (Clark, 1994; Cole, 2012; D'Amour et al., 2005).

Integrating Ethics Contents under the Joint Degree Framework

Following the definition provided above, curriculum integration is characterized by “thematic studies,” “multidisciplinary” and “multisubject” designs, integrated units, skills across the curriculum... There is no unique or single pedagogy for integrative interdisciplinary learning” (Klein, 2006, p. 9). Issues concerning integration of courses in an interdisciplinary education receive attention in the literature (Hanson, 2005). Since a lot of emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary education and training at various levels, the question that needs to be addressed is: should law and social work ethics lessons be integrated? On-going efforts by scholars and practitioners have focused more on proposing clinical or training programs especially adapted to the needs of few selected practice settings rather than an integrated model (Forgey & Colarossi, 2003; Kopels & Gustavsson, 1996; Madden, 2000). Few areas of intervention are mostly focused, including domestic violence, divorce, juvenile and geriatrics for which strong clinical curricula are in place at several schools.

The primary objective of education in this context is that if social workers and lawyers learn together they will be better prepared to deliver an integrated model of collaborative care and services to their patients and clients. By implementing an integrated learning model in the joint JD/MSW degree ethics contents, collaborative work habit, trust, and rapport would be promoted between the learners. Above all, curriculum should be designed to provide follow-up support to avoid creating a gap between what classroom instructors do and what clinical facilitators do to support practice-based learning. Also, each discipline would enhance the knowledge base of the other by contributing a new perspective, which could enhance experimental learning across both disciplines. Implementation of the joint degree program further requires that authorities take proactive team stance on creating the necessary structure and infrastructure, including staff development and funding needs.

Conclusion

The gap in the literature on ethics education under the JD/MSW degree program is obvious. However, literature related to ethics contents and pedagogy in law and social work institutions provides insight into the importance of teaching ethics to students as a required or core course. Given that mastery of ethical provision is key to professional decision-making in the event of a dilemma, its educational relevance to interdisciplinary education and interprofessional practice between lawyers and social workers cannot be over-stated.

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